

The Christian Responsibility to Influence Every Aspect of Society (Prov. 24)

Proverbs: The Wisdom of God as a Way of Life

Zionsville Fellowship | February 1, 2026 | Drew Hunter

There is a lot of disagreement about society today.

But here is one statement everyone can agree with: We're concerned. Things aren't the way they are supposed to be. We do not all agree on the problem or solution, but everyone agrees that there *are* problems. There are concerns about the family, the military, the government, the legal system, various oppressions of the vulnerable.

So, the question is—what are we as Christians supposed to do about this?

Here are three wrong answers:

1. First, disengage and let society rot and decay.
2. Second, get enraged and force people to follow Christ.
3. Third, influence society—but according to your own personal sense of what is good and just and compassionate.

So what are we to do? We don't disengage, get enraged, or influence according to our own sentiments. We are to gain God's wisdom to influence every aspect of society.

This is what Proverbs 24 calls us to.

Proverbs 24 shows us the Christian responsibility to influence every aspect of society.

We took a break from our Proverbs series for a bit, and now we're returning to it. The book of Proverbs does not just give us random tips for various bits of life. It is a curriculum in character development to help us live well in God's world.

It's framed as a book written for young men on the edge of adulthood—and it prepares them to lead and influence every aspect of society. It gives wisdom for every aspect of life—including the home, the military, the government, the judicial system, and addressing injustice and oppression.

This is what our society needs today.

So, here's the point this morning: **Christians should influence every area of society—and we need God's wisdom to do it well.**

We will see five areas of society that we are called to influence: the family, the military, the government, the frontlines of oppression, and the courts.

Our Responsibility to Influence Society

Before we look at these five areas, I want to show our responsibility to influence society.

This is reinforced throughout chapter 24. But before we even look at this text directly, the context shows that this is what is in view.

If you've been here for our Proverbs series, we've seen that this book is carefully organized. It's not just a random collection of quaint sayings. It is a progressively developed curriculum in character development. And it is especially framed as wisdom from a father to sons—it is framed as preparing young men who are on the edge of adulthood. It prepares them to lead and influence society as adults.

We are in the fourth section of this curriculum.

1. The first section is *beginning wisdom*, which is chapters 1–9.
2. This progresses to *elementary wisdom* in chapters 10–15.
3. Then it moves to *intermediate wisdom* in chapters 16 through the first half of 22.
4. Then this fourth section is *vocational wisdom*. This is the section of 22:17 through chapter 24. This section assumes that the father's sons are going to have influence in society. It prepares them to be husbands, fathers, workers, judges, royal messengers, and community leaders. And it gives them the wisdom they need to serve and influence well.ⁱ

Our text is the last part of this section on vocational wisdom. And it especially focuses on how to lead and influence various aspects of society.

So, stepping back: here is what this chapter is doing.

Proverbs provides wisdom to the young men who will lead the next generation. They are going to shape society, and they need God's wisdom to do it well. So, young men—this has a particular focus for you. Many people will tell you that you don't really matter, and that masculinity is toxic. But true masculinity—rightly understood—is a blessing to the world. This chapter gives you a vision for how to make a difference in the world.

But this is ultimately not just for young men, but for all of us. Proverbs invites all of us to take the place of these sons, to receive this wisdom. This is wisdom for all of us—men and women, young and old. And this is not just for ancient Israel; it's wisdom for leading any society to be more just.

Now let's consider the five spheres of society to influence with God's wisdom.

Sphere 1: The Family (v. 3–4)

First, the family.

Proverbs assumes that families are at the foundation of a flourishing society. It uses the image of building house to refer to building a family. And it says we need wisdom to build it well. This is verses 3–4: “By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.”

This is not just about getting married and having kids. This refers to *building* a household. And we need wisdom and knowledge to do it. Some of you work in construction—you build home and buildings. You know it takes skill and knowledge to do this well. Building a family is a craft that requires skill.

Now, the New Testament highlights that God calls some to singleness—and this is for the sake of building the church. But it still also emphasizes the importance of building families.

Proverbs shows that God ordered the world to help us flourish—and building healthy families is at the heart of this. So many of the problems in society are downstream from the breakdown of family life. They are downstream from fatherlessness. They are downstream from oppressive parenting. Dominant messages today say marriage is prison and children are a burden.ⁱⁱ And many voices tell Christians to stop idolizing the family. Some need to hear that. But others who do love God above all things need to also nurture their families.

So, here are few ways to gain the wisdom we need.

- Read and study what God’s word says about building a family. Grab a book from the resource center on marriage and parenting. Read it with your spouse, or kids, or a friend.
- Learn from those who are older and wiser than you. This is one reason why we encourage intergenerational relationships in our church.
- For those of you who are younger—don’t just plan for college or a career. Think now about how to build family. Or, how to use your singleness to build the household of God.
- And for those of you who are parents, give this vision of building a family to your kids. It’s easy to focus on preparing them for college or a career; but we often neglect explicitly preparing them to build a family. I’ve started telling my sons—do you see what I’m doing for you? I’m showing you how you can lead your children one day, if God gives you them.
- Finally, let’s help struggling families in our community and nation. So many injustices are downstream from unstable families—so caring for them is a way of preventing injustices. And advocating for policies that encourage healthy families is a way of promoting justice.

Sphere 2: The Military (v. 5–6)

The second sphere is the military.

Proverbs anticipates that some will lead the military—and it calls them to get the wisdom they need to do it well. It says they need wise people to help them make decisions. This is verses 5–6: “A wise man is full of strength, and a man of knowledge enhances his might, for by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.”

Some of you may end up leading in the military. Or maybe you will serve in a political office that makes decisions for the military. Proverbs addresses that. It anticipates that God’s people can be involved in this, and they need wisdom to do it well.

I wonder if it’s surprising to you that Proverbs speaks about military leadership.

I think many of us may have done what I used to do with Proverbs. I never noticed how much it speaks to politics, government, the law-court, and even the military. And this is because I reduced all those proverbs to personal, private bits of wisdom. I read verse like this one—that says “by wise guidance you can wage war,” and I simply applied it to making a decision in my life. But this verse actually assumes that some people will be waging war—and they better not make those decision alone or with foolishness.

We see how much this matters throughout history. Nations go to war with nations for such foolish reasons. Leaders often make their decisions on their own, and without wise counsel. Or a nation refuses to protect its people and its borders with wisdom—we’re seeing that in our own nation over the past decade. The conversation in our nation about immigration is important and complex. Our leaders need wisdom to navigate this.

Our leaders especially need the wisdom that comes from God’s word. True wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord and it reflects God’s character—his compassion, his justice, and his goodness.

Without wise people leading the military, we lose confidence. We don’t want to serve in the military because we cannot trust that it is for a just cause. Or we don’t trust that we’re being protected. Or we don’t believe that others are being treated justly.

So, for those of you who have served faithfully in the military—or any related field in government or law enforcement—thank you.

Sphere 3: The Government (v. 7)

This leads to the third sphere, which is the government.

We may miss references to government in Proverbs if we don't know how to spot it. In Israel, the place of local government was the city gate. This is where the elders and judges met. This is where disputes were resolved and trials took place. In a sense, this is where public policy was debated, settled, and carried out.ⁱⁱⁱ This is where laws were enacted and social norms were formed.

Now, what kind of people should be serving in the gate—in these places of influence? Proverbs says this is not the place for a fool. It should have people of wisdom and who uphold God's standards of justice. We see this throughout Proverbs. And it appears again here in verse 7: "Wisdom is too high for a fool; in the gate he does not open his mouth."

The gate—the place of community leadership—is not a place for a fool. This verse says the "does not open his mouth" in the gate. This either means he simply isn't speaking there, or it means the wise prevent him from speaking there. Either way, the point is that fools should not be making decisions for the rest of us. They shouldn't hold government positions, make judicial rulings, and form public policy.

Why is this so important?

Because government is a God-ordained institution, and it's given to promote justice. Politics, policies, and laws influence culture. They shape people's lives. A nation's laws will either be wise or foolish. They will be just or unjust. Proverbs was written for Israel to be a nation of justice and wisdom.

Now, some may think that the Old Testament only applies to Israel. But while Proverbs was first written to Israel—it is drawing on general, creational wisdom. It applies to all people and all nations because this is how God made the world to work.

And all through the Bible, even pagan nations were accountable to God's law. God judges nations according to his wisdom and moral standards. World leaders are accountable to God's objective standard of wisdom and righteousness. Local and national laws can be objectively just or unjust. Proverbs is saying that "the gate"—the place of community leadership—is to have wise people speaking.

So, how are we to view our nation today?

Many wise people have served in government in America. Many people structured our government with wisdom. Many wise men and women have blessed us by leading in local, state, and federal government.

But there have also been many fools who have led throughout our history. And we have many unwise people in governing leadership today. Many use their power and authority to spread foolishness. And we have seen this foolishness result in real consequences for people's lives. People are making decisions related to our border and immigration. And related to the criminal justice system. And related to abortion, adoption, and elderly care. And related to who is welcome into gender-specific locker rooms. The issues are complex—and we need the wisest people making these decisions.

Proverbs is written to lead the people to make sure we place the wisest people at the gate.

So, what should we do if we see that our local, state, or federal government lacks wisdom?

We should not just complain about the lack of good leadership. We should advocate for wise and good policies. And some of us should step in and lead. And we should actively support those who do.

Bruce Waltke wrote what is perhaps the greatest commentary on Proverbs. And he made this point as he reflected on Proverbs and government today. He said, [“If God established the State to restrain evil and promote good, should not Christians, and especially their leaders, actively influence the government to pass laws that both restrain evil as defined by God and enable us to live peacefully and quietly in all godliness and holiness?”](#)^{iv}

And, [“Christians are called upon through faith to clean up the political mess. In fact, would our country be in such a disastrous state if Christians had been responsibly involved in its government?”](#)^v

This does not mean we only vote for one political party without thinking. It does not mean we only vote for Christians. It does not mean we only criticize one side of the political spectrum. It means we lead and support and vote for those who advocate for truth and justice. It means we wisely weigh the options available—and we seek the options that most restrains evil and promotes good.

Sphere 4: The Frontlines of Oppression (vv. 10–12)

The fourth sphere to engage is the frontlines of oppression. This is wherever there is extreme oppression happening.

Verses 10–12 are three of the most significant verses in the Bible to me. This identifies the critical needs in our world, it calls us to act, and doesn't allow for excuses.

Verse 10 begins generally. It refers to “the day of adversity.” In context here—the previous verses refer to evil people who scheme and plan evil. And it says, “If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.” To “faint” here is not to literally pass out. It is about not showing strength; being weak. It refers to not doing anything when people are in distress. Or you start strong, and then become lazy or fearful or cowardly.

Verse 11 now gets specific about the problem and what we are to do about it. It says, “Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.”

What is going on here? These people are being taken away and condemned to death—and the assumption is that they are innocent. The verse is general enough to apply to a number of specific situations. In their context, this may have referred to people being kidnapped. Or taken to be put into slavery. Or when a foreign army overtook people and carried them away to death. Or it could refer to babies who were taken to be sacrificed to pagan gods. Or to a judicial system that was wrongly sentencing people to death.

And what are God's people to do? They are to take action and intervene. They are to rescue them and hold them back from this unjust death.

The point is this: Christians should actively protect people from extreme, unjust oppression. Christianity is not a private, isolate faith. We do not pull back from the culture. We cannot mind our own business when extreme injustice is taking place.

And verse 12 removes our excuses for not engaging:

“If you say, “Behold, we did not know this,” does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?” This means we all have a responsibility to know what's going on and to act.

Listen to how the 1800s pastor JC Ryle put it: “The man who is content to sit ignorantly by his own fireside, wrapped up in his own private affairs, and has no public eye for what is going on in the Church and the world, is a miserable patriot, and a poor style of Christian. Next to our Bibles and our own hearts, our Lord would have us study our own times.”^{vi}

If you're a Christian, you have a long heritage of faithful men and women who took this seriously.^{vii}

- When Pharaoh demanded to kill the Jewish infants, the midwives refused; and they secretly kept the children alive.
- When Israel was in exile, a king gave an edict for genocide against the Jewish people. And Esther risked her life to reverse that edict—she acted to change the unjust laws of the land.
- In the first century, abortion was normal. Infanticide was common—often through drowning or exposure, and especially with females or the disabled. The government leaders and philosophers all agreed that it was fine. But early Christian leaders explicitly taught against this.^{viii} Christians rescued babies, raised them, and adopted them.
- In India, the missionary William Carey saw people sacrificing babies in the Ganges River. He launched an effort to stop it. People said he was imposing his morals. But his efforts led to changing legislation to outlaw it.
- William Wilberforce dedicated much his life to ending the slave trade in Britain. He worked to change legislation. People thought he was an extremist, but he refused to give up.^{ix}

So, what are the frontlines of deadly injustice in in time? Here are a few.

1. First, abortion in any form.

The most significant question in the abortion conversation is simply this: Is the unborn a human being? If the answer is *yes*, then this is the greatest injustice and human rights violation of our time. And it's not even close.

And the answer to that question *is* "yes." An embryo or fetus or whatever name we want to use for that unborn human being—is not *part* of the mother. He or she is a distinct, living human being. The science of embryology confirms that embryos are distinct, living, whole human beings from the earliest stages—from the point of fertilization.^x Human life begins at conception—and that human life is worthy of the right to life.

This means that a baby in the womb is a living human just like a baby outside the womb. And they should have the same rights that we give toddlers and teenagers and adults.

There are about one million abortions in America each year. That is one million valuable human beings who are being taken away to death. And we need to do whatever we can to prevent and help them. We need to speak and influence culture to see this injustice. We need to advocate for policies that support these children. We need to care for and support vulnerable mothers and fathers. We need to offer ourself as families for adoption.

Now, I want to be clear that for those who have participated in this, the gospel is for you. God has grace and forgiveness for all who come to him. There is nothing that you have done that he cannot forgive. If you are carrying this burden, hear Jesus's words as he says, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

2. Here's a second area of critical need—and it's closely related: It's what often happens with IVF—in vitro fertilization.

Now, many Christians have not yet thought this through well. And it may not seem tragic and oppressive to us. It's done privately. It's done in a sanitary way. It's done with a doctor, and a couple who is often sincerely longing for children. And so I want to be particularly sensitive to those who have done this or are considering it.

But we need to be clear about what the process often involves. It *can* only involve creating one little life, and placing inside of a mother. But it often involves fertilizing multiple eggs, and thus creating several human beings. But what do you do with the extra embryos? They're either destroyed. Or multiple ones are placed inside the woman, with the knowledge that several will die in the process. Or they're frozen.

These are little human beings, made in God's image, worthy of protection. A basic principle should be that we do not destroy human beings. And we do not freeze human beings without their consent. Do you know how many embryos—little humans—are frozen right now in America? About 1 to 1.6 million. And there is no plan to make sure all these little ones get to develop further.

Again, we need to have compassion on those who have done this or are struggling. But we also need to be clear about the truth and always pursue justice.

3. Here are several other urgent concerns related to this verse: the persecution of Christians is often about unjustly killing them. Domestic abuse is often a hidden tragedy—and can lead to death. Sex trafficking is often hidden in the shadows, and still takes place in America. Concerns related to immigration are here as well—we are called to care for the sojourner and not oppress them; and we are also called to protect citizens from those who seek to harm people.

There are many other forms of oppression—but these are some of the most severe.

Proverbs calls God's people to "Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter."

This is the fourth sphere of Christian influence in society—the frontlines of oppression.

Sphere 5: The Courtroom (vv. 23–29)

The fifth and last sphere is the courtroom. The justice system.

Verses 23–25 says those who serve in a legal setting are to do with justice and impartiality.

Notice how it says the people will respond to the way you judge. Verse 23 says, “Partiality in judging is not good. 24 Whoever says to the wicked, “You are in the right,” will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations, 25 but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come upon them.”

This pictures an unjust judge who acquits someone who is guilty. It says the people will curse this judge.

Why? Because the way the justice system rules affects real people’s lives. The guilty person has wronged someone. If they are let go, they are released do it again. And that will incentivize others to do the same thing. The community will be harmed by this. This is why they curse that judge. But if you rule with justice, the people will seek your blessing.

And then verses 28–29 speak to those who are called upon to be a witness in court.

It says to not testify against your neighbor without a good reason. And don’t do it as a form of **payback or revenge**. “Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips. Do not say, “I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done.”

This is speaking of a legal setting, but it also applies today in a broader way. Many people try to manipulate public opinion to fit a narrative. They frame an event to make it fit a narrative. They share only certain details that fit their narrative. Some people explicitly lie; some are deceived by those who lie. It’s a huge problem today, and it happens along all parts of the political spectrum. Even those who “fact check” often need to be “fact checked.” I reposted something recently that I thought was exposing a false-narrative; and it turns out that much of this was itself a false narrative. We need to do a lot of sifting to find the truth today.

What do we need?

We need wise and just people to serve as judges... to serve on the jury... to speak as witnesses... to serve as journalists who report truthfully... to start trustworthy news platforms... We need to be personally committed to sifting stories and speaking truth.

I’m grateful to all of you who do this so well—serving professionally in the legal system, or being faithful to speak truth when bearing witness.

Implications

My goal this morning was to help us gain and strengthen this conviction from Proverbs 24:

Christians should influence every area of society—and we need God’s wisdom to do it well.

Proverbs 24 shows us five spheres to influence: the family, the military, the government, the frontlines of oppression, and the courts.^{xi}

So, how do we respond to all of this? I’ll give two brief answers, and then a quote.

First, keep the two messages of the Bible together, and in their proper order.

The Bible gives us two messages: One message is that God ordered the world a certain way for our good—and we love our neighbors by promoting this reality. That’s what we’ve focused on this morning.

The second message is the *central* message of the Bible—it is the gospel. The gospel first tells us that we have failed to love our neighbors like this. We have failed to promote a good and just world. Each of us has rebelled against God and harmed others.

But the gospel also tells us that Jesus came to live a perfectly just and compassionate life. And he died on the cross for our sins—taking the judgment we deserve. And he rose again and offers both forgiveness and transformation. And one day he will come and renew all things and create a perfectly just world.

This is the central message of the Bible. Jesus alone is the true hope for our culture and every nation. You can trust him, be restored to God, be forgiven and receive eternal life.

And listen to how the gospel message relates to the first message: When we believe the gospel, the Spirit transforms us to live according to God’s ways. He transforms us to love our neighbors. He begins to transform every part of life. And he leads us to influence every aspect of society for the good of others.

This is the first response—keep the two messages of the Bible together, and in their proper order.

Second, consider how God has uniquely shaped and equipped you to make a difference.

Not everyone needs to serve in local, state, or federal government. Not everyone needs to build a family. Not everyone will participate in the judicial system. But some of us do. And we should encourage one another to serve in any way we can.

And it also takes many different gifts:

- Some of us may serve on the frontlines by starting a pregnancy help center.
- Some may help by adopting, or helping fund an adoption.
- Some may help by teaching your children and grandchildren the value of life.
- Some may help by working to form wise and just immigration policy.
- Some may help by serving in the military and leading with wisdom.
- Some may help by serving on a schoolboard.
- Some may help by becoming a missionary to another culture—sharing the gospel and seeking to influence culture there.
- And we can all influence by the way we use our vote—keeping in mind the person, the platform, the people they appoint, and the policies they will make. We use our vote to seek to restrain the most evil and promote the most good.

I'll wrap up by sharing something Francis Schaeffer once wrote.

Schaeffer was one of the most influential Christian intellectuals in the 20th century. One of his books is titled, *How Then Shall We Live*. He published this exactly 50 years ago. He overviewed the rise and decline of Western thought and culture.

He showed that we're in a bad spot. And he was concerned about Christians standing by and not influencing and engaging. So he briefly laid out the Christian responsibility to engage. What he said fits perfectly with the vision of Proverbs 24. Here's how he put it: “as Christians we are not only to *know* the right world view, the world view that tells us the truth of what *is*, but consciously to *act* upon that world view so as to influence society in all its parts and facets across the whole spectrum of life, as much as we can to the extent of our individual and collective ability.”^{xii}

ⁱ Paul Overland notes that in Prov 25, the student will be already employed as royalty or councilors in the royal court. But here they are on the brink of their career, heading toward that potential. Paul Overland, *Proverbs*, in AOTC (London: Apollos, 2022), 458. The student will have new opportunities as commissioned by these leaders (22:21). They are in the “gate” with the elders, and they have opportunities to either allow or disallow taking advantage of the poor (22:22-23). They also may have money now, so people will look to them for loans or to put up security for them (22:26-27). They have new opportunities to advance their career and social standing (22:29), and new opportunities to eat with a ruler (23:1-3) or in another lavish setting (23:6-8), etc.

ⁱⁱ See Ryan N. S. topping, quoted in Daniel Darling, *In Defense of Christian Patriotism* (New York: Broadside, 2025), 169.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bruce Waltke and Ivan DeSilva, *Proverbs: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 344.

^{iv} Bruce Waltke, *Proverbs and Politics: The Biblical Foundation for Righteous Governing* (Bruce Waltke, 2015), 25.

^v Bruce Waltke, *Proverbs and Politics*, 27.

^{vi} J.C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*, ch. 19. Also Plato, “The price of apathy towards public affairs is to be ruled by evil men” (Quoted in Bruce Waltke, *Proverbs and Politics*, 17).

^{vii} See John Ensor, *Innocent Blood* (Adelphi: Cruciform Press, 2011), 74–78.

^{viii} The Didache taught, “There are two different ways: the way of life and the way of death, and the difference between these two is great. Therefore do not murder a child by abortion or kill a newborn infant.”

^{ix} He wrote, “never, never desist till we... extinguish every trace of this bloody traffic, of which our posterity, looking back to the history of these enlightened times, will scarce believe that it has been suffered to exist so long a disgrace and dishonor to his country. Quoted in John Ensor and Scott Klusendorf, *Stand for Life* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2012), 52.

^x See Scott Klusendorf, *The Case for Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), ch. 2.

^{xi} There is another thread woven throughout this chapter: it is how to view and interact those who are foolish, unjust, and causing trouble. These are the people who make it hard for us to influence these five spheres for good. These people are promoting foolishness or injustice—and the difficulty is that they also use the language of justice and compassion and moral goodness. So how do we view and respond to them? Here’s a summary of what this chapter teaches: Don’t envy those who plan trouble. Don’t join them in evil. Don’t be anxious about them. Recognize that their influence harms people. And when you have victory over them—don’t gloat.

^{xii} Francis Schaeffer, *How Then Shall We Live*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 1976), 256.